GOD HELP US

SPIRITUALIZED
GLASGOW KING TUT'S WAH WAH HUT

THE FIVE Spiritualized members lock into an economical groove. Guitars chatter hopefully when they're not yelping; the rhythm section is precise and on time; a gospel-drenched organ pins listeners to the ground in supplication. Jason Pierce sits, strums along, and sings in a heartfelt manner, "*Lord, hypnotize my soul*". It's either another religious awakening or a metaphor for the consumption of death-defying amounts of hard drugs. It's definitely a Spacemen 3 song.

"I had an option to do solo work," Jason says post-gig. "You can't believe everything you read in the press. Spacemen 3 have an LP coming out later this year, and there might be a tour – we haven't discussed it yet. Spiritualized just runs parallel to Spacemen 3, it's a completely different venture."

The colourful rumours (that Sonic had disbanded Spacemen 3 and kicked the other members out for not taking enough drugs and abusing the band's name) are being set straight. Yet tonight Spiritualized have been billed as 'Spiritualized Featuring Spacemen 3', to which Jason replies "We have no control over the way promoters bill us". There's no anomosity and he won't be drawn into a slanging match.

Spiritualized's interview technique makes Dinosaur Jr seem like motormouths. Silence is as good as any reply and they distrust tape-recorders and the press. Observing them over a 24 hour period it seems they don't care about *all* those normal things bands are supposed to care about (except the 'rock' drummer). Apathy rules the roost: they're avowedly apolitical and mostly given to long *periods* of contemplation, like Trappist monks. There are no plans, no schemes, each day is taken as it comes. All this leads to their reputation for taking serious drugs . . .

"Drugs don't play an important part in our lives," Jason says. "It seems bands are now being lauded for consuming vast quantities of Ecstasy, etc. But I think it's a macho thing – it's no different from builders boasting in the pub that they can drink 16 pints. We want no part of it."

These guys are so laid-back it's untrue. There must be something more to it. Maybe they're suffering from radiation sickness from a recent Sellafield visit. Probably they're still pissed off at my comparison in these pages, two years ago, of Spacemen 3's drones to Hawkwind. Anyway, the way their first-ever performance mesmerises us isn't that far removed from the effects of soft drugs. I give up the interview when Jason starts interviewing me and my mind drifts back to last night's set.

Spiritualized are something brand new. They might have antecedents in terms of influences but these are so obscure as to be negligible. Even their versions of Spacemen 3 songs are quite removed from the originals (they only play a couple of Jason's songs, so a Sonic number like 'Revolution' isn't used as a crowd-pleaser). What's making me cream myself is the way they've got rid of those annoying drones often used to test the audience's patience and devotion to the cause of nothingness.

For want of a better term I'd call it modern devotional music. The influence of church singers and gospel is readily apparent, but married to a chugging rock beat or gentle pitter-patter rumbling drums not far removed from the Velvet Underground's Mo Tucker. Phrases like "*wash away my tears*", and "*you gotta go back to the river*" are imbued with baptism imagery and 'Feel So Sad' is the most representative slice of downcast depression. Here the guitars are celestial, orbiting another galaxy light years away, ebbing and flowing like the sound of weeping. Jason's voice comes to the fore but doesn't dominate and there's pure anguish in his words. He's a peculiarly gifted songwriter, and would go very far indeed if he could only be bothered.

The audience is surprisingly partial to Spiritualized. Will said earlier that he expected chants for Spacemen 3 songs and loads of heckling but the audience just want more of whatever it is they're serving up. Sometimes Spiritualized rock out, step on the gas pedal and let their hair down, which is quite effective but not as all-consuming as the slower-paced stuff. They know the right speed is half speed.

Still, an upbeat cover of The Troggs' 'Any Way That You Want Me', the debut single, is the most successful number. The reasons are numerous: no extraneous playing, a dancey beat that's actually undanceable, and the refusal to do what half the charlatans in the current chart do – by rote, not-for-note covers. It sounds like a '90s version of a '60s classic as opposed to a '60s-influenced parody that has no place in the '90s.

So, Spiritualized acquit themselves well. They might not exactly capture your attention with a distinct lack of stage movement (Jason sits throughout the concert), but the sounds – varied, distinctive on-the-edge – are more than enough. If you get the chance, seeing them is a must, as long as you remember not to take amphetamines.

AFTERWARDS THEY'RE too apathetic to bother looking for clubs to chill out in (ambient rooms would be perfect for these guys, they'd just put their feet up), so we settle in the King Tut bar. Many drams later we find a party, a warehouse party it seems, but the revellers have locked themselves in and won't answer the door.

"We've always played dance music, we've always been into dance music," Will says, facetiously, an indirect snipe at some of their contemporaries. Then I get a chance to hear some remixes of the new single. These are nothing short of brilliant, with hypnotic rhythms and mantra-like sounds overlaid on top. Not necessarily dance mixes but not too far off either (there's more rock in there than Andrew Weatherall would allow – he didn't do the mixes). The dub version is especially spacey. I ask Jason when they're coming out on vinyl.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not sure if they're coming out. I'm not sure if I really like them and I'm not sure if I can be bothered, really."

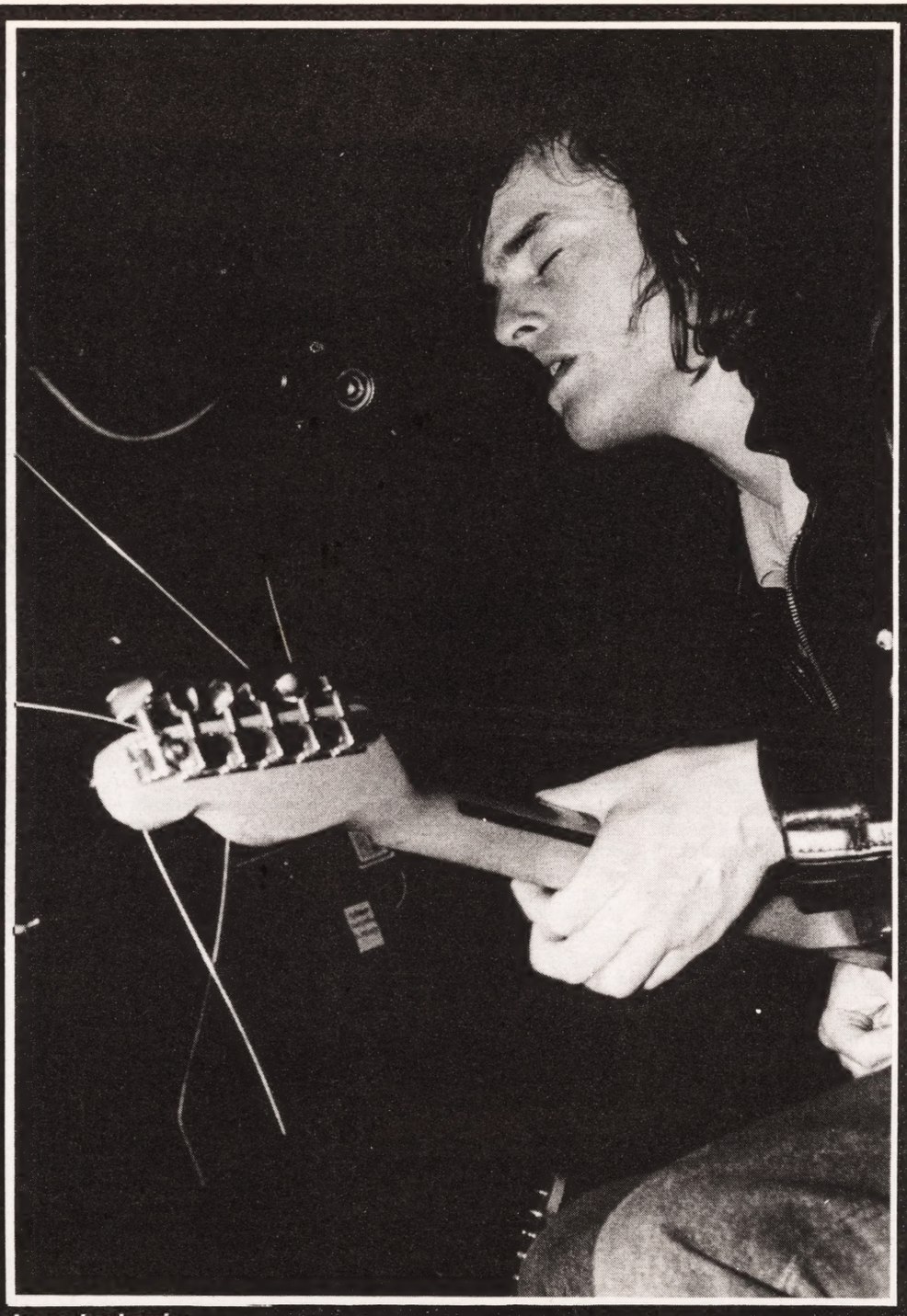
Do you think you're commercially viable?

"I don't think about it to be honest. With Spacemen 3, who could say if drones were commercial or not? Spiritualized is just something we're taking as it comes. We're halfway between intellectual deliberation and using our instincts."

What do you do outside music?

"I'll tell you later."

Dele Fadele



PICTURE: MARTYN GOODACRE

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